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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Jorge Montaña
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
1 October 1999
Mexico City, Mexico

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Yale-UN Oral History

Jorge Montaña

Interviewed by: Jean Krasno

Mexico City, Mexico

Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Ambassador Jorge Montaña on October 1, 1999 in Mexico City, in Mexico. And so first for the record, Ambassador Montaña, would you explain where you were born and educated and when you became involved in your country's Foreign Service?

Jorge Montaña: Yes, I was born in Mexico City in August, 1945, and I was educated at the National University, Mexico. I have a law degree and a political science degree, and then I went to do a Ph.D. at the London School of Economics. I wrote a thesis on political sociology, and I've been doing research at different academic institutions in Mexico and abroad, and I have several books published on political sociology and international relations. I became a member of the Foreign Service of Mexico in 1979, and I've been a member of the service for almost 20 years. I went through different positions in the Foreign Service, mainly at the Foreign Affairs Ministry. I was Director General. Then I was Assistant Secretary, Undersecretary, and then I went to the UN as Permanent Representative, and later I became Ambassador of Mexico to the United States. For the time being, I have special permission to be out of the Service for two years. I am doing research and I'm also working at private activities.

JK: Okay, great, thank you. What years were you at the UN?

JM: I was at the UN from December, 1988 until January, 1993.

JK: Okay, so '88 to '93. Would you be able to explain for the record, for history, Mexico's role in the Contadora Process?

JM: Okay, I just want to say that I would want to add that before becoming Permanent Representative at the UN, I was Assistant Secretary in charge of Multilateral Affairs, and as such I had to deal -- from 1982 to '88, during presidential administrations -- with all the positions of Mexico in the various multilateral forums, that is mainly for the purpose of this research. The UN and the Human Rights Commission and of course the OAS and the various bodies of the OAS that were competent or trying to be -- at least they tried to be competent -- in the Central American conflict. So then I had a general overview. It was my responsibility to follow the various activities of Mexico in these different forum, and as you are aware, Mexico had a leading role in not only the UN or the General Assembly, but also the specialized agencies, such as the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization], ILO [International Labour Organization], FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations], that had an important role to play during the conflict in Central America. As far as Contadora is concerned, I was also part of the team who gave support to the Contadora team -- mainly from Mexico -- in preparing documents and helping negotiations and obviously getting the support for Contadora in the Multilateral forums. So that's the part that I really

played the most – trying to get my country, being the leading force or one of the leading forces, trying to get not only support for Contadora, but also support for some of the Resolutions that were pretty dear to us, for instance, the ones on human rights. Mexico was the leader in the Human Rights Commission in Geneva and also the Third Committee in New York, and also the OAS, trying to condemn the massive violations of Human Rights in El Salvador, massive violations of human rights in Guatemala, and in all the countries, but for the purpose of this it's important only to mention those. It's important to recall that at that time also we had important violations of human rights in Chile, that Mexico was also the leading force. So in fact that was mainly the role that we played during the Contadora process. The Multilateral forums were extremely supportive of Contadora, trying to get and to bring to the table people from Europe, in Asia, trying to convince them that it was important for them to participate closely with the efforts made by the four original Contadora countries and then the support group and lately the real group. So in a way it was duo-track. One was the one played in the region and the other one played mainly in the Multilateral forums.

JK: Okay, well as long as you were so closely involved with Contadora, what's your evaluation of the process itself.

JM: Well I think the process was a very relevant, significant one. In fact, as you probably recall, at the beginning of the conflict in Central America – mainly Nicaragua – Mexico became very active in 1979 and went out of its traditional principles in foreign policy, and we condemned Sumoza [Anastasio Somoza Debayle], and we asked for

Nicaragua to be expelled from the O.A.S., which was fairly new as an activity of Mexico. Then President López Portillo [José López Portillo] became closely linked to the new government in Nicaragua. We helped them a lot. Lately, in 1981, Mexico went out again -- from the point of view mainly of moderate or perhaps conservative groups. We went out of our track again, supporting what it was called *A Common Position Between Mexico and France Regarding El Salvador*. This was an important communiqué that recognized the FMLN/FDR as belligerent forces that according with the Geneva Convention gave the FMLN and the FDR the protection of such agreements. So Mexico, with France, played that important role.

JK: And then, I wanted to just emphasize that for a moment, because that became a key factor later in being able to negotiate with the FMLN. So when was that, and how did that evolve?

JM: Well that was in 1981. 1981 is the Mexico-French Communiqué that created some noise in the region. Some countries were forced by the U.S., at that time, to become very critical of the Mexican position – mainly countries like Venezuela. One has to recall that in those days, beginning of '82, the new government in the United States, headed by President Reagan, was very much against any effort of the region, and it was not sympathetic at all about what Mexicans were doing. I'm not talking about Contadora yet, because Contadora wasn't created until January 1983, but in '82 it was obvious for the new administration in the U.S. that Mexico was too active, and it didn't want Mexico to be that active. So that's why Mexico looked for support outside of the continent, and

the new government headed by Mr. Mitterrand gave that support. So that's why it was so important –

[Ringing telephone, and break in tape at this point]

JM: So I guess that that particular point about why Mexico decided to move with France is because we were so feeling like the new U.S. administration was going to be extremely harsh with Mexico, and we wanted to have a permanent member of the Security Council, an important ally of the then-so-called “European Community,” someone who could give us the support, and also the political leverage, and also the endorsement, the political endorsement that we needed for our work in the region. I'm talking about '82 now. '82 was the last year of President López Portillo, and it was a difficult year for Mexico in economic terms. However, we kept at very close support, mainly to Nicaragua. Mexico was the one who gave more material support and also technical assistance in that first part to the Nicaraguan government. That sort of created us a bad atmosphere in Washington. We were aware of that, but so we kept working until – the new administration in Mexico came into office with President de la Madrid [Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado] at the end of '82, December of '82, and soon in '83 – that is a month later – we got together in the Contadora Island with Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Mexico. We have discussed a lot about –

JK: Excuse me just one minute, but who initiated that meeting in Contadora, and why were those countries invited?

JM: Precisely that was what I was going to say. It's a great debate about what was first, you know, the egg or the chicken. It's a debate, but all I can say is that Mexico played a very key role trying to put together. We sort of thought that it was important, not only to give support to Central America or to Nicaragua. Perhaps that was less important, but we wanted to give instead of quantity, quality. Instead of more trucks or buses, we wanted to give the real political support that was badly needed. And that's why, with Venezuela, I would say that Venezuela and Mexico were the leading forces, although President Betancur [Belisario Betancur Cuartas] from Colombia also played a key role then. But perhaps the most important part is that the four countries decided to get together, and they sort of accepted the Contadora Island as a place. For Mexico it was important because we didn't want to appear in the eyes of the United States as the ones who were the protagonist ones, and we had at that time a very critical internal situation in Mexico – an economic crisis. And we had also a very hostile attitude from the U.S. administration, so we didn't want to appear as the infant terrible, of the picture 109], and we accepted to have the meeting outside of our country. However, that doesn't mean that the U.S. accepted that Mexico was not playing a key role. On the contrary, they always found – as probably you recall – our fingerprints everywhere, and they always thought that – although we always had a different spokesperson and spokesperson – they always claimed that Mexico was the leaders of this initiative that they found unfriendly against the U.S. interests. And that was the opposition of the person who personally – and became a very hot kind of issue between Mexico and the United States. From then onwards, however we moved, from doing something bilateral to

something regional, the U.S. kept strong pressure on Mexico for our activities in the region.

JK: Well the Contadora process was not able to end the civil strife, and did the Esquipulas process evolve out of Contadora or what is the relationship?

JM: Well, in my view – this is my very personal view, personal appreciation of the events – I think that the reason why Contadora didn't achieve the purpose of pacifying the region was the U.S. exercised a lot of pressure in the Central American countries, and you look at the last document of Contadora and you look at what Mr. Arias [Oscar Arias Sánchez] put together, Mr. Arias didn't do anything except changing the name of the act, and moving all the Central Americans to Esquipulas and getting rid of the Contadora group. In fact, if you wanted to find a better example of someone violating all the international conventions on intellectual property, you can find that as a good example. What Arias did was simply to reproduce all the Contadora statements and change into a different stationary with the national emblem of Costa Rica, and that was it, but the pressure exercised by the U.S. on the Presidents, saying: "We can go along with you, as long as the Contadora group is not behind you." So that's why they sort of changed gears and decided this is a Central American issue. They used us as an excuse. I think that was a good word from the U.S. diplomacy for removing the Contadora countries – and mainly Mexico – and getting rid of us, not only for the purpose of the Nobel Prize -- Peace Nobel Prize -- but mainly they didn't want us to have leverage in the region. So that's why the U.S. made that effort, and that's what explains – from my point of view – why we moved

from the Contadora spirit to the Esquipula spirit. However, in our view, that was not important. What was important is to have peace in the region. But I think Contadora played a most important role, that is, Contadora was the main obstacle for the Freedom Fighters, for Mr. Reagan to invade Nicaragua or to do other things. I think Contadora was, in a way, a tremendous force of political integrity, of moral force, that impeded the most radicals in the U.S. government not to move into the arena of invading Nicaragua. In fact, we kept working very closely with Central Americans – and mainly with the Nicaraguans – not as a country, as a region, trying to give them support for instance when there were mines on the ports of Nicaragua, explaining people in the U.S. Congress about what the U.S. were doing and why we were not pleased with the flow of money into the region, arms into the region. And we were certainly concerned about the fact that this was a matter of national security for Mexico. The number of people coming into Mexico -- perhaps going into the United States or staying in Mexico -- were growing by the day, people who were – they were not considered refugees, but in fact they were – moving into Mexico and the United States were growing by the day. We also had a number of arms coming into our country. President Reagan also claimed that Central America was in the backyard of the United States. For us it was part of us. It was not backyard. It's part of us. We are so close, so integrated racially, culturally, politically, that for us it was unavoidable to work with them. Of the four countries in Contadora and of the eight countries of the Support Group, Mexico was the one closer to the region. El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua are closer than many states of Mexico to Mexico City, you know? So for us it was extremely important. So that's why I think Contadora played a very key role in this, even if we don't receive the last recognition for the motherhood or

parenthood of the peace process, that doesn't really matter because history will make very clear, one day or another, that the last document that we presented was exactly the same document that the Presidents approved, except that it was not with the support of Contadora but with the support of Mr. Arias.

JK: And I understand that there had been direct connections between the U.S. State Department and Oscar Arias.

JM: Absolutely, I think Oscar Arias received that directly from Washington, and it was very clear that it was just a maneuver to get rid of the Contadora group.

JK: What was the evolution from the four countries in Contadora to the eight countries, then, in the Rio group?

JM: Well, we soon realized that the Contadora effort had limits, and it was important also not only to achieve peace in the region but also to have economic development, so we moved to invite countries that were coming out of the dictatorship at the time. They had the first democratic government in many years, so the reason why invite for instance the countries so remote to Central America, like Argentina, even Perú, is because we thought that it was important to have also an economic front. And remember that all these countries in the region were struggling for the same thing: debt. So we wanted to have a common front on economic development, on debt, on the position of our countries in the financial institutions – international financial institutions. That was, let's say, the

“carrot” to bring into the same boat the South American countries, the new democracies there. And soon we had – instead of four, we were eight, and then we came twelve in Acapulco, in 1987, but at that time all with the aim of having economic cooperation among ourselves.

JK: So were the conflicts that were ongoing in Central America a threat to the economic development of Latin America as a whole, as well as to security?

JM: I don't really see it that way. I think that, in a way, the way we saw it was that the conflicts in the region were a threat to the security, but the reason why you had those conflicts was economic. So that's why we insist a lot that those countries really need badly economic support and economic development, and that, from our view, will be a great support to avoid – at least to stop the conflict.

JK: Okay, now I was talking to you earlier about identifying the role of the FMLN as negotiators in a possible peace process. So, in Mexico City there was an agreement that evolved, that then identified the FMLN. Were you a part of that?

JM: Yes. In fact, let me say that the FMLN played a very – the FMLN and the FDR played, from my point of view, one of the most intelligent cards of all the conflict in Central America, even more important – for they did have even a more articulate foreign policy than many countries. They were very active in almost every single -- political, multilateral, social, cultural – and they had four or five people that were like

ambassadors, moving from one place to another constantly. They kept an office in Mexico that was the central corporation for the region, and we sort of gave them all kind of facilities. We discussed this with the Salvadorians, with the Salvadorian government, and during the more critical years the Salvadorian government accepted that Mexico was better than Cuba. So it was better for them to be at hand in Mexico instead of having them in Cuba. So the FMLN was always very active in the intellectual circuits in Mexico, also in close contact with the authorities in the government. Most of the time they were very respectful of the Mexican Law. They would never get engaged in – with one exception that we will speak later – in any internal affair in Mexico. And that's why I believe that the FMLN was always on the offensive side on the diplomatic front, which is something very important to recognize, because, in a way, they manage to make appear the government always as the one violating human rights, making the government look as repressive government. So they were bringing their war out of El Salvador, whereas the Salvadorian government was overprotected by the United States, so they were the bad guys of the phenomenon.

JK: Well that also brings me to a question that I wanted to ask you about Cuba, the role of Cuba in this. Did Mexico have some kind of understanding with Cuba on the role of the FMLN here in Mexico or in the process?

JM: Well, Cuba was also very careful and respectful about not doing any kind of dealings with the Salvadorians here in Mexico. Cuba kept constant channels of communication with the FMLN. We were aware of that, but I can assure you that they

were very respectful not to do that to Mexico, and the different members of the FMLN used to go very often to Cuba to consultations and discussion, and we are positive that they never used Mexico as a bridge for any kind of aid to El Salvador. So we were, in that sense, we were very careful, and we had our intelligence sources following all these people, because we didn't want to be accused by the United States that Mexico was used as a sanctuary, or Mexico was being used as the bridge to channel military aid or support to El Salvador. I cannot go into details, because I don't have the details about what other channels they used, but probably Nicaragua was a better channel, or others, for weapons if that is the case, or for other kind of support, but I can assure you that — from that point of view — they used mainly our daily flights to Cuba in order to go there, instead of using other means. But we also insist with the Cubans that we didn't want them to sort of get involved with the Salvadorians in Mexico, and that was very important for us in order to keep also our credibility with the other side, and that's what gave us the opportunity to have that credibility.

JK: Was there also any understanding that Cuba would stay out of Mexico, in terms of supporting any other kind of Marxist movements in Mexico?

JM: I think from the outset, you know, I think from the '60's — this goes back to the '60's -- that Mexico was always very, very open with Cuba and the Soviet Union, that we could have a very friendly relationship with both countries, and with others in the Eastern European countries, but under the condition that they would never act or support any force in Mexico. In fact, in 1971 we expelled something like 45 diplomats at once, from

the Soviet Union, and that was a good example for the Soviet Union that we were not playing games.

JK: These were diplomats in Mexico, Soviet diplomats in Mexico, and you expelled them.

JM: And we expelled them in March, 1971 because we found them doing activities with some groups -- guerillas and so on -- that we had at that time in Mexico, and they were expelled. And subsequently President Echeverría [Luis Echeverría Alvarez] in '73 or so went to the Soviet Union, had a very open conversation with Secretary-General Brezhnev [Leonid I. Brezhnev], and we emphasized that particular point. The U.S., on the other hand, were claiming that the Soviet Embassy was the center of all sorts of operations in the region and they had a tremendous center of communications and support, but I guess that at that time of the Cold War the U.S. and the Soviet Union really kept, in Mexico, important centers of operation -- intelligence operation. And they were sort of chasing each other. They had the biggest embassies abroad, which was very funny that the Soviet Union had such a big embassy in Mexico. It was perhaps easy to understand why they had a bigger embassy of the U.S., but they were playing that game until the end of the Cold War.

JK: And so the Mexico City Agreement that established the FMLN as the negotiating party was a sort of a natural evolution of the process that had been building to that?

JM: Well, you have to recognize that, recall that we always made emphasis on the fact that we were not talking about FMLN alone, but FMLN/FDR. The reason – this is an important clarification, because the FDR was the democratic force, and the FMLN was the armed force. So that's why the joint communiqué of France and Mexico was supportive of the FMLN/FDR as belligerent forces. It was not only the FMLN.

JK: FDR, you're saying that FDR – what does it stand for?

JM: Frente Democratico Revolucionario was a series of political groups that were – let's say the historical leader was Mr. Guillermo Ungo, and they presented candidates to the presidency. And the only two main political forces that were not part – because it was mostly on the social democratic side – the Christian Democrats and the ARENA were the ones that never accepted to participate with the FDR, but it was small groups. Many of them were closely linked to the International Social Democracy is a group of political parties that were set up, organized by the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional], the government party in Mexico. And the FDR was mainly – I would say you want to characterize the FDR – was mainly a social democratic party. So for us it's important to stress that particular point that we always had with us delegations that were integrated by members of the FMLN and the FDR. This joint diplomacy was always of the two groups.

JK: Oh I see, okay. That's a good clarification. So now, how and when was Mexico first asked to become a part of the group of friends of the Secretary-General of El Salvador?

JM: Well, I just want to say briefly that from '83 to '89 Mexico was in close contact with all the groups, not only because of the Contadora process but because they used to come back and forth between Mexico and El Salvador, between Mexico and Guatemala, between Mexico and other countries. Mexico was, let's say, the most important center, a real venue for all these groups, and as I said, they kept the authorities informed about what was going on and so forth. And obviously the governments in the region were aware of this particular. It was not a clandestine kind of activity -- they used to fly to Mexico with a visa and so on and so forth. In December '88 we had a change of government in Mexico. President Salinas' inauguration was on the first of December, 1988, and since the campaign of Salinas at that time was also campaigning Mr. Bush for the United States, so we had some change of views -- during the campaign -- about the candidates. I was at that time out of the Foreign Service for a year, so I was International Advisor to Mr. Salinas in the campaign. We had several meetings with members of the Bush campaign as well. We discussed Central America. We discussed the fact that Central America was a key issue between the two countries, and we wanted to find some ways to get rid of that as an excuse for a hostile attitude between the two countries to each other. So the week before the inauguration of Mr. Salinas, let's say about seven weeks before the inauguration of Mr. Bush, we met in Houston in one of the military bases there, and it was a very friendly and very cordial kind of meeting between the two

elected Presidents. And it was, in a way, replacing the atmosphere – a very poisoned atmosphere – that prevailed from '82 to '88 between the two administrations, between President Reagan and President de la Madrid. In fact, Central America became the excuse for the U.S. to establish the certification process on drugs, to start also the legislation against immigrants to the United States. Let's say the background of this was the fact that the two countries disagree on Central America, so the U.S. retaliated on the bilateral front – on drugs and immigration. We're still having these two issues, but for different reasons, but the years where the U.S. created the IRCA [The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986] on migration and also the certification process on drugs. So Salinas and Bush decided from the very beginning, from the outset, to create the mechanisms to stop having Central America as an issue between the two countries. And they accepted that the UN should play a bigger role in-

JK: Oh, in that meeting in Houston, maybe?

JM: In Houston it was discussed – that particular point -- and that was 22nd of November. Salinas was inaugurated on the first of December, '88. And it was discussed that the UN should play a key role on this. In fact, we invited the Secretary-General, Pérez de Cuéllar, who was very skeptical about playing a key role, and the reason why Pérez de Cuéllar was skeptical is because first of all he was a Latin American. Secondly, he tried several times, in good faith, and he always found the U.S. and the Soviet Union right in the middle. And he never found the support of the region, so Javier Pérez de Cuéllar was, as I said, reluctant to get involved into this. So during the inauguration

ceremonies, Secretary-General sent – Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar – sent Alvaro de Soto along to Mexico, and Alvaro played a key role. We met with the newly inaugurated President Salinas, and Alvaro flew back to New York to President Salinas that Mexico was prepared to give all the necessary support to the UN in whatever kind of activities they could develop in the region. By the same token, it's important to recognize that immediately President Bush, January 1989, when he became President, when he was inaugurated -- Bush had been a Permanent Representative of the UN – was very well aware of the role that the UN could play. So I think the two countries became very much involved, giving support to Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and giving them assurances that the two countries were on the same track, which was almost impossible for them to believe after so many years – from '79 to '88 – that we were really, openly having political fights in the UN, OAS, and so on and so forth, having completely different points of view on how to solve the problem. We had always, in Elliot Abrams, a great enemy of Mexico. Elliot was always against everything that we presented, everything against that we had in mind. He always had the impression that we were an evil force in the region. Elliot was out of the picture. We had Bernie Aronson [Bernard Aronson] in the State Department, and Bernie was, from the outset, much more open, flexible to understand and particularly trying to put together a common front between Mexico and the United States. In the UN, I was appointed Ambassador there, and I found perhaps the most able diplomat I ever met in my life in Thomas Pickering. Pickering was not only an able guy, but had experience. He had been ambassador to El Salvador. He knew the region. He spoke the language, and he was also a tremendous force supporting a new attitude of the UN in the region. So I guess that that, from my

point of view, explains the changed attitude that the region sent to Pérez de Cuéllar, to the UN, and why Pérez de Cuéllar decided to also change attitude towards the region, because he found out that – in good faith – not only Mexico and the U.S., but other countries that were aware of the fact that Mexico and the U.S. were in the same track, were also giving open and full support to different peace processes. We start with convincing the Nicaraguans to having elections and then to recognize the fact that whatever the outcome and whoever will win the Sandinista will accept, and I think we helped Pérez de Cuéllar to keep under control the OAS that the OAS wanted to play a key role. The OAS, at that time particularly, was not well seen by many countries, and mainly for the rebel movements, and so we kept the UN as the leading force.



JK: Okay, let me just get some clarification on the role of the OAS. Was it primarily the U.S. as the member of the OAS that was causing the, and when you talk about the rebel forces that you are speaking of the Contra?

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JM: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, that's the reason why we didn't want the OAS. And not only Mexico, but let's say the most important actors in the region were very resentful and very skeptical about OAS, because of the past role of supporting the other forces, and the fact that the U.S. had such an influence there, we didn't want them to participate so actively.

JK: And what was the role of the Secretary-General Baena Soares [João Clemente Baena Soares]?

JM: I would say that he was always very constructive, but I'd say that the O.A.S. – as I said before – had no leverage in the region. And Baena Soares is a good diplomat -- didn't have the opportunity to approach the radical members of the various liberation movements in the region. So his role was, from my point of view, very limited.

JK: Okay. So now, back to my other question about the group of friends, as to how you were approached on that, or how that began and when that began.

JM: Yes, once Alfredo Cristiani [Alfredo Félix Cristiani-Burkard] was elected and we found with great surprise that – because he was elected as a candidate to the most radical, rightist party, ARENA – and we were really surprised about the fact that Cristiani had such an interest, such a big interest on doing something concrete and positive in his own country. I think, from the outset, Cristiani was very constructive, and he had to convince others, including Mexico, he was acting in good faith. And I personally had tremendous doubts about someone coming out of ARENA suddenly trying to make peace in his own country, but we were convinced soon that he was acting in good faith. He had the decision, he had the will to do so, and when the first talks between El Salvador government, Salvadorian government with Cristiani and the Secretary-General in the one hand, and the FMLN and the UN, and the FMLN in Mexico, so we discussed a role for the UN to be playing. I think that in 1990 it was clear and obvious that nobody was going to win the war, and it was kind of a standstill. People were being killed. I think it was the end of the Cold War, and it was clear for the FMLN at that phase, sooner rather

than later they will be suffering from the lack of support from the former Soviet Union, from other Eastern European countries, even from crazy people. So I think that they moved wisely to a negotiating position. In the other hand, Cristiani received clear indications from the U.S. that they could not really prolong the channel of dollars to the military there, that the conditions were different, and it was better for Cristiani to think about how to go a step, or several steps forward in order to bring peace to El Salvador. And I think that – what I want to say is that both sides, for different reasons, they reached the same conclusion. Nobody was going to win the war, and their own, let's say “god-parents,” the Soviet Union and the U.S., were not really prepared to continue giving the open support they were giving in the '80's.



Tape One, Side Two

JK: So, you can continue.

JM: Yes, that created the best political conditions for both sides, accepting a gradual process of negotiations. Once again, the FMLN and the FDR were from the very beginning very reluctant and skeptical about a fair play. And I would say that Mexico and the Mexican President and the Mexican Foreign Minister and every one of us was always trying to convince them that for them there was no choice, for neither side, that they better discuss in good faith and gave all the power to the UN to be, they say, the “power broker” in terms of the negotiating process. So I guess that sort of became convinced, and it was the FMLN initiative to have the other governments involved, as a

kind of guarantee that they would not be trapped by beauraucracies or by international agents, that they would really participate. So FMLN/FDR were the ones who discussed with the Secretary-General to invite a number of countries, and from the outset they decided that Mexico, Spain, Colombia, and Venezuela would be the best actors. Why these four countries? I would say that in the one hand, with Mexico it was obvious, because they had been based here. The fact that Mexico was also able to speak with the government – we had full diplomatical relations. We had an embassy there. We had investment there. Mexico is a relevant country in El Salvador. Obviously we had kind of a different approach and different points of view with the Salvadorian government, but at the end they recognized that Mexico was there in good faith. The Salvadorian government really resent that every year, twice a year, Mexico was – as I mentioned before – the leading force on the Human Rights Resolution, and they were very upset about it, but for us that was the only way to keep an eye. We had a special reporter appointed there. He was a very intelligent man, who had to present every six months a report on the human rights situation in El Salvador. So Mexico was an obvious choice from both sides, and then Spain for being a country out of the region, a country that has historical links with the region, and the fact that Felipe Gonzales was a Social Democrat that had the credibility of the FMLN. This El Salvador government found that Carlos Adrés Pérez [Carlos Andrés Pérez Rodríguez] in Venezuela also had the necessary credentials to be also a good supporter of the process, and Mr. Barco [Virgilio Barco Vargas] – later he was replaced by Gaviria – but it was Barco, Barco in Colombia. So the four Presidents – and I think it's important to recognize, because as I mentioned to you before, we resent very much the fact that in his memoirs Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar didn't

include the name of the four Presidents and the fact that they were actively engaged -- mainly the President of Mexico and the President of Spain -- and the fact that we pay a tab for that support, because sometimes our activities were not exactly well-seen inside our countries and were not well-seen either by some groups in the United States.

However, we stick to the idea that Mexico and the other three friends had to play a role. So I guess that we were not only supportive in New York, but we were supportive in our capitals and also in Washington.

JK: What was the involvement of the U.S., the USSR, and Cuba in relationship to the group of friends? Were there different levels?



JM: In fact, I would have to say that we never consider the USSR and Cuba as part of our process. However, we consider always the -- we used to say either the "Fifth Friend" or the "Four-Plus-One," and we kept always well informed, closely informed, the U.S. mission in New York and also our embassies in Washington and our capitals about what we were doing. In fact, I have to say that the peace process in El Salvador was a result of not only the activities of the Secretary-General and his aids, but also and mainly it was possible because of the political support of the Four-Plus-One. And the Four-Plus-One was so important because the "Plus One" -- the "One" was the most important in terms of being the one and only country who had the leverage with the El Salvador government, leverage with the military. And at certain points the negotiations were stuck, it was the "One" -- not the Four Friends, but the "One" -- who were approached by the Four Friends saying "there is nothing to do with this particular negotiation unless you send somebody

to El Salvador.” And sometimes you had even people of such a stature, like Colin Powell, travelling to El Salvador for two or three hours, talking to the military there, and back into the United States, and then the Four Friends were able to move ahead. I think that –

JK: At what juncture did Colin Powell – what were the issues that, in this case, sent him there (and then we can talk about others)?

JM: I would say that Powell and others were very actively engaged, and even at one point moving in to El Salvador. Obviously there was a different way, but talking to the military there when the negotiations between FMLN/FDR and the UN on the peace agreement were stuck, and mainly about what kind of guarantees that the members of the FMLN will have in the peace process, the National Police, let’s say issues that were very closely-linked to national security issues, not about agrarian reform, but about what are we going to do with the weapons afterwards? Are we going to have an amnesty afterwards or not? When you will find the military in El Salvador on very reluctant positions to accept political solutions. After all, for them the guerillas were killers, were assassins, and were illegals, were unlawfals, and they used this type of language. And sometimes their negotiators would not prepare to accept absolutely anything. That’s exactly when the “Plus-One” played a very important role, because none of our countries – President Salinas, for instance, was in close contact with Alfredo Cristiani, but we were certainly clear that we didn’t have the leverage, the necessary leverage to move and remove obstacles. We had leverage with the FMLN. We had leverage with the FDR, but

we don't have that clout with the government, and none of the Four Friends -- I would say that none of the Four Friends had clout with the government. So that's when we used the good offices of the U.S. government. When you talk about the Four Friends, it's always important to stress the fact that we always considered the Four-Plus-One. And very often that we had meetings, we separate the meetings of the Four Friends, and we used to say: "Well, now we need a meeting of the Four-Plus-One." And the Four-Plus-One was mainly in our Mission -- the Mexican Mission -- not because it was the best located (it's around the corner from the U.S. mission), but because my government and my president were the ones who were more actively engaged personally. I think that that's very important to stress. This has nothing to do with who was more protagonic. The fact that the FMLN/FDR had their base in Mexico, had confidence in -- historical confidence -- in Mexican authorities, gave us, not a distinction -- because in a way it was not a distinction. It was very expensive to have the meetings here in Mexico. We paid for a number of these meetings in 1990, 1991. If I'm not wrong, I think Alvaro de Soto has the very account that I have, but I think the first year the UN group, the UN team, was extremely well-conducted by Alvaro de Soto, although that created tensions with other friends and so on and so forth because Alvaro was considered some days like that he was leaning on the side of the FMLN or other side. The FMLN was saying that Alvaro was giving everything to the government. This is normal in any negotiating process, but I was going to say that the first year, 1990, when they start discussing, I hear they spent almost like 180-something days in Mexico, and the next stay they spent well over 250 days in Mexico. I think that Alvaro was mostly living here, and it was difficult for Mexico --

JK: Who paid for all of that?

JM: Well, the UN used to play a part and we used to play -- Mexico and the government play a lot of these retreats that they had to have in different parts of Mexico. Sometimes we had to deal with the fact that one member or another -- not from the UN team, but from the FMLN or from the government -- were not very pleased with this hotel, with other hotel, with these kind of things that, now it sounds like anecdote, but at that time it was very annoying that you were paying, you were putting everything together, and some of them were not very pleased with the food for instance, you know?

JK: Mexico paid for the hotel, paid for the food. Did you also pay some for the air transportation, airfares of bringing people?

JM: Yes, we used to give them some support. The UN also, at one point also had to get some monies for this, because we got fed up with the fact that we were only paying the tab and the fact that we had to pay for -- sometimes even authorities from El Salvador ask us for air tickets from El Salvador to Mexico. And we think that was very useful, and obviously Mexico was playing a role, and we had to pay for that. And it was difficult for the Salvadorians to move to another country, first of all because we were the closest country to El Salvador of the Four Friends, and they couldn't really go to the United States until we reached the stage where they went to the UN.

JK: Yeah, they didn't visas to get in.

JM: Yes, we had a lot of problems for them to get the visa, because there are certain provisions in the INS [United States Immigration and Naturalization Service] that do not allow people who have been engaged in armed struggles and armed struggles that perhaps had killed U.S. citizens, and some of them were sort of involved in that type of characterizations. It was very difficult to get them. I think Pickering – again the “Plus-One” for instance was very important, because we need to have certain actors sitting in New York, and so they had to go to very painful discussions in Washington trying to convince the right people that it was key that these people will have to come to New York. And they came every time with law restrictions. They couldn't really move from one street to another. They had a limit of streets they could go, and so it mainly was in the surroundings of the UN. So sometimes that we met -- for instance, in the residence of the Mexican representative that is on 72nd street -- they were out of limits, and so they were smuggled in by our friends. So they were against the law every time that we had meetings at –

JK: At the residence.

JM: At the residence, because we were in 72nd, and they were not allowed to move from 40-something, 47 to 52, from the UN area. And they couldn't go further than 3rd Avenue either, you know? So that was ridiculous, but it was very important, and that was the only way to get the famous waiver for them to go into New York. So going back to

the discussions in Mexico that we had at almost everywhere at different hotels in Mexico City, different hotels outside Mexico City. And, as I said, we had the problem that they couldn't really stand each other. We had to put them separate, and it was Alvaro who was moving from one room to the other, at least until the last part of the negotiation. Even the last day we had this particular problem because we couldn't get together the two delegations, and so we had to separate them on different floors of the UN. So that part was very important, but what I was discussing is why Mexico had such a leverage, once again, because President Salinas, Secretary Solana were very much engaged into this. And again, we had no choice. We wanted to have peace. The FMLN and the FDR didn't accept to move to any other place, and that's the reason why it was the two sides who decided that the signature of the peace process took place in Mexico. It was a recognition of the fact that for a decade and a little bit more of that everything happened in Mexico.

JK: Absolutely. I wanted to just ask you, though, on the USSR and Cuba, did they agree, though, to not obstruct the process?

JM: Yes, we're talking about a different Cuba and USSR to the one that we discussed before. We're talking about the USSR at the end of the Cold War. We're talking about 1990, 1991. The USSR was in the process almost of disintegration. In fact, during the last days of Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, I recall that we had a meeting on the 24th of December, and we had a meeting in his own residence. He was suffering from some back pains or some problems with his legs or something. So we met there, the Four Friends, and he received there the confirmation from Gorbachev that for all practical purposes the USSR

was going to be dismantled at the end of the year, and Russia was going to take the seat on the Security Council. So we received directly from Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, right away, the news that the Soviet Union was no longer the Soviet Union, a week from then, from Christmas Eve. And we were discussing with Javier until late at night, and next day, the 25th of December, we were in the middle of very complicated negotiations. In fact, my family is still recalling that I didn't have Christmas and I didn't have New Year's Eve. And on the 25th of December – I'm going to be very open with this – I drove into my residence, into the Mexican residence, three members of the FMLN and two members of the U.S. delegation, and we were discussing some wording, and we were discussing some kind of things that – and as I said, I'm not authorized to say what members of the U.S. delegation, but I can say that we all were aware that we were doing something illegal, in terms of – but it was something illegal with the purpose of achieving peace. Nobody was in my residence. My family was already in Mexico, and so we kept working for almost eight hours. And three of the most important – at least two of the most important commanders of the guerrilla were sitting there for the first time eye-to-eye with the U.S. And that Christmas Day was extremely important. Once, if I see the others disclose their names, I will recognize whether it's true or not, but that Christmas Day was critical for us to move ahead once without intermediaries, the U.S. and the guerrillas. I can assure you that Joaquín Villalobos was there, and at that time Joaquín was the head of the leading military force in El Salvador and the guerrillas. And it was Joaquín who had, obviously, the power to decide certain things. And then we discussed, the day after with the Salvadorian delegation, the governmental delegation, some of the achievements that we reached that day, on Christmas Day. So I guess that that week was

so critical in terms of what the friends of the Secretary-General could do. We had meetings almost ten, twelve hours, fourteen hours in the Mexican Mission with both sides, and then we moved into the UN, back into the Mission, and so it was the headquarters for all practical purposes of this. At different points – and my colleagues from Venezuela, Colombia, and Spain will definitely tell you this. In fact, Ambassador Sepera? from Colombia was here about a couple of weeks ago, and he made a public speech and recalled the day that we thought that everything was going to fail, and I suggested that we should go to see the Secretary-General. The other three were very reluctant, saying: “But we don’t have appointment.” I said –

JK: Okay, I wanted to talk about this because actually Bernard Aronson and two other people had told me about this, and one of the things that I wanted to ask you –

JM: Who told you that?

JK: Bernard Aronson.

JM: Ah, Bernard Aronson.

JK: Yes, and the Venezuelan ambassador.

JM: Arria [Diego Arria].

JK: Arria, yes, right. So, now what day was this that you went?

JM: Well, I think that I would have to go into my diary –

JK: It was near the end of December, right?

JM: I know it was the end of December. It was, let's say three days – I would say probably 28th, 29th of December that –

JK: Okay, something like that.

JM: We knew that this was going to explode, and I said: "We have to go immediately." And my three friends decided that we had to get the appointment, be proper and so on and so forth, and I said: "Well, like in the days when I was a student leader, let's go, and we have to open that door even if the policeman doesn't allow us. We have to get there." And yes, I used that expression: "If it's necessary we kick the door." I've used that expression. It's true! They say that is true. I said: "We kick the door," and –

JK: I believe that. Ambassador Arria said that.

JM: I said that is my sense, and they said: "But Jorge, it's impossible." "Yes, we have to move that way. Pérez de Cuéllar would not play a role unless we tell and explain

him.” There was not a good chemistry between some of my friends with Alvaro de Soto. I was the one who kept, until the very last day -- and still today, remains today -- in very close communication with Alvaro. I think that was very unfair that they were considering Alvaro guilty of something, inclined to one side or the other. And I was always on his side, because I thought – not because Alvaro was friend or anything – because I thought that if the UN didn’t have our support then the whole process was going to collapse. So we went into the Secretary-General, and obviously we --

JK: Okay, so it was you, and was Arria with you?

JM: Yes, I had told you before, I had my car, and I said: “Let’s go, yeah?” I was driving the car, and I said: “Let’s go to the Secretary-General’s office.”

JK: Okay, so you had the four ambassadors with you –

JM: Yes.

JK: And then when you got into his office, was Alvaro and Goulding there? Was Marrack Goulding there?

JM: It was, exactly, yes. And obviously Pérez de Cuéllar was shocked, but the fact that – first of all, the guard told us: “I’m sorry Mr. Ambassadors, but you don’t have any appointment.” I said: “Is without appointment.” And when the guard went into the

corridor, and I said: “Let’s go move to the next station, the next station.” And we moved to the next: “What are you doing here, Mr. Ambassadors?” “We are here.” [makes a knocking noise]. Judging that we are outside the door: “We need to see him right now.” The other three were, let’s say, less audacious? That’s how you say it?

JK: Yeah, yeah.

JM: They were very, very upset about this: “Jorge, what is going to happen?” And I said: “Unless he opens the door right now, I’m going to get in by myself.” And it was decided. I was decided because I thought that that was the only way to break that standstill, and obviously it was a misunderstanding as well involving the UN. And fortunately Javier opened the door and said: “Well what is going on?” And said: “We’re very sorry” – I was the spokesperson – “very sorry, but we need you to get ?. This is a very serious matter. You have less than 72 hours as Secretary-General.” And he was using the language like: “Well I’m going into vacation, to holiday, the day after tomorrow, and I’m very sorry guys.” And I said: “Listen Mr. Secretary-General, I’m not going to talk to my friend. Mr. Secretary-General you have a responsibility, and if you don’t want to that responsibility, we’re going to have a press conference. And we’re going to say that the UN Secretary-General did not want to participate with this.” I was using very tough language, but the reason why I was using that tough language is because we spoke with both sides, with the government and with the guerrillas, and we knew that it was only the leverage of the Secretary-General that could put the things together. And Javier was tired, was ill. As I mentioned to you, he had these back pains, had problem

with the leg, and it was in the last, really the aftermath of this 10 years at the UN. He was, I would say, fed up.

JK: And his wife had reservations for that weekend.

JM: No, but that was on the 31st. No, that was on the 31st. That was a different occasion. No, no, this is the 29th.

JK: Oh, okay.

JM: And I said: “Well, you are fed up. You are tired, but we need you, and you better get back into the arena or we’re going to say that you weren’t. We are almost there.”

And he told me – he told us: “Don’t make so much fuss. On the second of January you will have a new Secretary-General, fresh and prepared for this. You’ll be discussing this with Boutros-Ghali. He’s fully aware of this thing. He’s already there at the U.N. Plaza. Go and see him.” By the way I informed Bernie Aronson of Washington. I said:

“Bernie, we are on our way to seeing ?. We need your full support. If Pérez de Cuéllar will not accept this, we are going to have a press conference. We need to do a press conference, Four-Plus-One.” And he said: “Okay, that’s fine. Let’s do that.” He was in Washington. I called him from my car – and as I say, I didn’t have the full support of the other friends, who would worry about the fact: “We are not plenipotentiary, you know? What your president is going to say? ‘How come you went into the office of the Secretary-General?’” I thought that it was necessary. They didn’t have time to get

instructions – that was the point of some of my friends – instructions on the 29th of December, when your president might be in the beach, might be with the family, and I said: “For me there is no choice. So we better do --” Fortunately after a very sour meeting with Javier, he decided to move ahead. He started again the diplomacy with both sides, and we got out of that stagnate, standstill where we were, and then –

JK: Can I ask you a question about that meeting, again, because my understanding – and you can correct me – is that Alvaro de Soto was not as worried about Pérez de Cuéllar becoming involved in the process and that Marrack Goulding was more supportive of what you were trying to do.



JM: Yes, in a way that was the only part that – from my point of view – I share some concerns of my friends. I think that Alvaro – that’s correct -- Alvaro didn’t want the Secretary-General to play a role because Alvaro wanted to play the role. This is a kind of very human attitude, but in a way it was a selfish attitude, because Alvaro didn’t have any longer the leverage. That was exactly my point when both sides had sort of lost faith in Alvaro and de Augustin?. So that’s why I said: “Unless you move, neither de Soto, neither Goulding can do anything. It’s you. We are convinced of this. We have spoken with both sides. Both sides are, for one reason or another, both sides are very, very skeptical about your team. I know that once you move this thing --” Alvaro would recall this. Yes, it’s true. Alvaro was reluctant, and I would say that he put it very intelligently in saying: “I don’t want the Secretary-General to get tainted by this thing. Both sides are tired. Fatigue is there.” And I said: “No, I have assurances, and they made a

commitment. We are here because we spoke with both sides alone, but they don't want to beg this thing with you. They want to have conversations directly with the Secretary." It's true. Goulding, yes, Goulding was more careful -- as a good Englishman, you know -- but he was kind of saying: "I think the Ambassadors are correct. I think, Alvaro and I, we are in a way already overruled by both sides, and this is something that needs your clout, your leverage, your authority." And it's true. So again, so the process restarted. At one point we were sort of threatened by one side: "Why won't they leave Washington? Why won't they leave New York? We are leaving tomorrow." And it was very funny. We didn't discover it the previous process of negotiations that we had in September, when Cristiani would spend there about 10 days in New York, when we had the first agreements, with the ones we were working from September to December. The ones from September were very critical, very important, and Cristiani didn't have transportation, and we lent him one of the aircrafts to go to New York, and apparently because the negotiation was going to last only about 24 hours. And the negotiation lasted about nine or ten days, and the plane was there, and people were saying: "We need the plane." "No, you cannot take the plane because Cristiani can fly back today." Cristiani was saying: "Please," asking President Salinas, "I want to -- Because otherwise the media will kill me if they know that I don't have any longer the plane, and I'm not --" Because he was always playing with his own media, saying: "If I don't have a response for this particular point today, I'm going to get back. I'm going to break the negotiations."

JK: Oh, I see, so he had to have the plane waiting.

JM: So the plane, there, was very important as his symbol that he was really always about to break a deal, and so that's why it was kind of his signal. And I haven't said what did I think – it would be an omission must I not say anything about Mrs. Cristiani. Mrs. Cristiani [Margarita Cristiani] played – from my point of view – one of the most important roles in this peace process. A quiet, silent woman who was always there with a laptop, near President Cristiani, and when we had difficult moments Cristiani used to look at Margarita, his wife, and without really saying anything Margarita just say yes or nod with the eyes. And we knew very well that the lady was a tremendous influence there. And as I said, she was always with the laptop taking notes and so on and so forth, but we had very complicated moments between wordings or approach to the various aspects, and Cristiani always relied on the good judgement of his wife. And I think it's very important to say that, because without her I think that this peace process would not really reach the level that we reached. And finally, by the end of this process -- probably what Bernie mentioned to you would be another complicated moment, that would be the 31st -- that we started very early discussing the greatest aspect of our mission. Mainly, the agrarian reform one was one that was very critical, and from the government the negotiator was the then-mayor of Salvador who then became President of El Salvador, Calderón Sol.

JK: He was there.

JM: He was there as negotiator of this particular part, and in the guerrilla side was Handal – Shafik Handal – and they hate each other. It was mainly a problem of chemistry. Again, people were tired. It was the 31st of December and last day and so on and so forth, and it was a very complicated day. Aronson was there in New York, and we were kept very close together, the Four-Plus-One. And again, Pérez de Cuéllar said that, about five o'clock: "Okay guys, I'm sorry. I'm leaving." And he us to our missions, and again we said: "No. We are going immediately to the UN." And we called Aronson and Pickering, and we moved into the UN. That was around five thirty, six o'clock. I met Mrs. Pérez de Cuéllar in the corridor. She leveled me with her eyes, you know? Javier was very pale, was in tearing pain, and we sat at the Map Room, and I said – I was the spokesperson again – and I said: "Mr. Secretary-General, we understand that you want to leave?" And he said: "No, I don't want to leave, I'm going to leave." And I said: "Well, I have the support of the Four Friends and the United States to say that we don't want you to leave. We are sure that in the next six hours we are going to complete this. I'm not going to play games about moving the clock and all these things, but then he said: "I'm sorry. I have a plane already waiting for me. I'm going to Miami, and the plane is leaving at seven o'clock." Bernie Aronson sent me a note: "You think that I can ask the Federal Aviation to stop the plane?"

JK: Stop the plane! So Bernie sent you that note?

JM: And I said: “You can say that to him.” And I said: “Mr. Secretary-General, give us half an hour. We go downstairs. We can speak with both sides, and then we bring you assurances that people are prepared to break a deal tonight.”

JK: Okay, so now I just want to get the logistics correct, because now the FMLN were more or less meeting in one set of rooms. Where were they?

JM: At that point they were – I mean, we didn’t have time for the game that “I’m not going to see each other.” I would guess, from the 29th they started to get together, not with President Cristiani –



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JK: Pardon?

JM: Not with President Cristiani.

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JK: Not with President Cristiani.

JM: But yes, with the other members of the delegation. It’s in that picture, you know? Cristiani was kept in one place, but so Cristiani couldn’t really meet them.

JK: He was in the UN, but he was in a different office.

JM: Yes, in a different office and different floor, as well.

JK: Oh, okay.

JM: And we had the 38th and 37th floors, people on both sides of the elevators working on the different issues. So that's why the logistics were very cloudy. We had only to go downstairs one floor, two flights, and you were there with the actors. And I said: "Okay guys, we have 30 to go back to the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General is supposed to leave, and unless you decide to be serious and to accept that we can take back guarantees and the Four-Plus-One will be there -- back with Pérez de Cuéllar -- and that's the only reason why Pérez de Cuéllar will accept to stay in New York. Otherwise he will catch a private plane at 7:00. So it is up to you. It's your country that's in the middle of this thing." Now, I said: "I can assure you that --" I remember perfectly well, I said: "I can assure you that the new Secretary-General, even if he's in good faith, the new Secretary-General would like to reopen everything." I didn't have instructions to say that, and I didn't have any grounds. I was really clearly lying to them, but you need that, you know? At one point I said: "Well, I have to do --," but it was -- And I received a note from one of my friends saying: "Who told you Boutros-Ghali would change anything?" And I said: "Nobody." Nobody.

JK: But it was a believable thing to say.

JM: It's believable, I mean, you would have new people there. Probably de Soto would not be there. Marrack Goulding would not be there, and so and so forth. And I

said: "It's one, either you take it or leave it." And since you could communicate with them in Spanish it was even better, because you have emphasis in your own language. It's very important, and I used some strong language as well, not necessarily nice words. And I said: "It's either you decide whether you want this to work, or you want this to collapse, when we are discussing this many words, and you have people dying. People have been dying for almost 20 years, and so I don't understand how come you are playing like kids. And I'm sorry to speak that way to ministers and whatever. Probably tomorrow your President can ask my President to remove me, but now, as a friend of the Secretary-General, I have to say that if Pérez de Cuéllar is going to remain, and be consistent and serious, and when we have that guarantee, we will go back to the 30th floor, speak to Pérez de Cuéllar to give some guarantees. So they discussed among themselves, and I said: "10 minutes," because I said: "In 30 minutes we have to be back, and we have to be serious. 10 minutes, we convene again." And Aronson said: "Jorge, did you get everything?" I said: "Yes, everything from the table, and they all say they don't care. They probably would like to go and have a few drinks. This is New Year's Eve, and that's it. And my family's in Acapulco, what do you want me to do, you know? Perhaps you can invite me to have a drink with you, but what we can do? Nothing. So, after 10 minutes both sides came back to negotiating. "We accept, and we're prepared to work like mad until we finish and so and so forth. We need you to help us to break a deal in this part." There were only three or four issues, important ones, but they had to be aware that we were not really playing games. And you know that it is very often in this type of negotiations, you set the time limit and then you – in diplomacy you call it "slowing the clock for us" or "pulling the clock ahead," depending what you need. We

said: “We’re not going to play with clock. In one minute, Pérez de Cuéllar is leaving this building forever. This is for sure.”

JK: Oh that’s right, forever.

JM: It’s up to you to decide what you want to do. So okay, we went back into Pérez de Cuéllar’s office at the Map Room. He thought that we would fail. This is purely the work of the Four-Plus-One. This is not the work of the UN. The UN was already out of the picture of the two parties. That’s why I think it’s fair to say that the U.S. played a very important role. Without the Four-Plus-One – and that’s why I disagree completely with the account that Pérez de Cuéllar gives in that chapter of his book, because it’s very unfair. When you have at one point Bush calling Cristiani, Bush or Baker doing things personally in these type of things (or President Salinas, and so on and so forth), and to rely on your own judgement, saying: “It was the work of this team.” Yeah, the team was very useful, and the team put together everything and so on and so forth, but the political leverage of the Four-Plus-One – mainly of these I would say Mexico, the United States, and Spain, but Mexico and the United States – so that’s why at that point they relied on us, on the representatives of the government, not on the beauraucracy. So for them somebody from Spain, somebody from Mexico, somebody from – these two countries are very important, Spain and Mexico, below the United States. See, Venezuela was already in troubles, as Carlos Andrés Pérez had already did first attempt of the coup d’état, Mr. Chavez [Hugo Chavez].

JK: So they had domestic problems.

JM: A lot of domestic problems. Colombia was very reluctant, always, to be very active. Why? Because they had their own guerrillas. So, in a way, Gaviria, when Gaviria came to office, said: “Oh my God, but why are we going into this when we have such a mess in our house?” So Colombia was always very inactive. Venezuela was more active because Arria was active. Arria was very close to Carlos Andrés but didn’t have the leverage, like I did, of calling my President and my President calling President Bush, or my President calling – I mean I didn’t have the leverage. It was my president who had the leverage. It was my country who had the leverage. It was my country –



Tape Two, Side One
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JK: Okay, so we’re just starting the second tape, and we were talking about the events at the U.N. on December 31st, 1991, when you were doing the final hours of the negotiating on the El Salvadorian peace process.

JM: Right, well as I mentioned before, we received assurances from the two sides that we could go back to the Secretary-General’s [Map Room001] to give him guarantees that they would keep working the next five hours or so, five hours and thirty minutes. And they asked the support of the UN team in order to put together some ideas on issues that were pending, like agrarian reform issues and the National Police. And so we were able – the Four-Plus-One – to go back to the Secretary-General and give him guarantees

that in five hours and a half – but we asked him not to leave the building so we could ask him to, at one point or another, his guidance, his own views, if it was necessary for him to talk to the -- So he told us: “Well, I’m going to leave the building.” We said: “No, you’re not going to leave the building. We need you in this building. We need you in this building for practical purposes.” And yes, I think that in that sense the Four-Plus-One were a little bit tough with the Secretary-General in the last hours, but we thought that it was necessary. And Pérez de Cuéllar -- to be very honest – although he was not feeling well, although he was under very strong pressure of his own family, his own wife, he stayed there, and we all had pizzas and sandwiches and so on and so forth, and we were able to have everything together almost quarter-to-twelve and to go back to his own ?[Map Room017] where the final signature took place one minute before midnight.



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JK: And it wasn't quarter-after midnight? It really was midnight?

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JM: It was exactly one minute before midnight. It was just amazing. And I was very worried about the fact that – I knew very well Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and I knew that he's very straight and very strict with these kind of things, and I knew that midnight he was going to leave the building. Obviously he left the building around half-past twelve, after we celebrate, discuss, and so on and so forth, but the formal work he finished before midnight. This is for history, for records, and that helped us as well with the two parties, to make them feel that it was the last chance, last opportunity. And the Secretary-General was not playing games, and we were not playing games. And it was their country, after all. I mean, we like very much the Salvadorians, but he was not a Mexican. He's

Venezuelan. He's from the U.S. So: "We care a lot about you, but it's your sons and daughters the ones that are dying, not ours." So we used to love that type of lines on the last minutes, because that was the only way for them to walk the extra mile. And we knew that it was difficult. I'm not saying that it was simple. It was difficult, and so it was painful as well, and they knew very well: "If I give this, how am I going to explain to my own galleries tomorrow, to my own people tomorrow. And after all, we were fighting for this (one side or the other), and now we are giving up --" Yes, negotiation is that give and take, and it was very complicated, especially because they had no choice. That was the thing, and that's why I am here recognizing the maturity of both sides, especially the maturity of President Cristiani, because the authority was Cristiani. The President was Cristiani. The one who had been elected was Cristiani. The other ones were rebels and playing for their own cause, but Cristiani, at this day for me, deserves the high recognition of why the peace process was possible.

JK: Now ultimately the final agreement was signed here in Mexico, in Chapultepec, in January.

JM: 16 days later, yes.

JK: 16 days later.

JM: Yes.

JK: Why was it set up that way? Were there some issues that still had some fine-tuning to be made?

JM: In fact yes, there some few details that were necessary to put together, minor things that really didn't need for both sides to remain in New York, but it was more the format of the agreements more than anything else and the fact that the new Secretary-General was taking office on the first of January. And so it was decided that the sooner the better, and as I mentioned before, both sides decided it was Mexico City, something that – well, some of the Friends were expecting other capital. We, the Mexicans, we didn't push at all Mexico City as a place to sign. Both sides came to approach me, and I said: "Well, I'm going to call President Salinas." President Salinas gave me the clearance that very first of December. At one point some of the Friends say: "Well, why don't we have this thing before, and we can have it here at the UN Headquarters." I said: "No. It's very important --" because it was Cristiani's point -- "It's very important to have that in the region, first in Mexico, and then we'll all go to El Salvador to have the big celebration there, but we want this to happen in Mexico." And that's the reason why we moved to Mexico and had the Secretary-General – by the way, Boutros-Ghali invited Pérez de Cuéllar to be present, and as the gentleman that he is, as the good diplomat that he is he thought that the light should be for the new Secretary-General, not for him, and so he didn't accept that invitation. We also made an invitation on behalf of President Salinas, but he told me: "You know, I'm no longer the Secretary-General, and the one and only is Boutros-Ghali, and so he's the one who's going to be there."

JK: Right. Now you wanted to look at the photograph that is in the book -- Pérez de Cuéllar's memoirs -- to identify some of the other people in the photograph who weren't identified beneath the picture there.

JM: Well as I said before, I guess that it is extremely important that we recognize and give the credit to whoever deserves the credit, and I think that the four persons that appeared behind the Secretary-General, going from left to right, is the Ambassador from Spain and Ambassador Jorge Montaña from Mexico --

JK: That's you.



JM: Ambassador Diego Arria from Venezuela, and an Ambassador from Colombia.

JK: So the Four Friends are right here.


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JM: The Four Friends were, we were in fact the guarantors. So that's why it is amazing that my friend Pérez de Cuéllar didn't give the recognition. As I said, we were representatives of government. It doesn't really matter, our names. What is important is we were representing the Four Friends, and the Four Friends were not included in the explanation of who was signing. We were there as guarantors of our country. By the way, this is Calderón Sol. Did you recognize? He is Calderón Sol, the President of El Salvador.

JK: Yes, to the far left.

JM: Yes, who later became President of El Salvador, until a year ago – Armando Calderón Sol, who was not part of the small delegation.

JK: Right. That's really helpful, though, to have that clarification, because that will be lost in history. People will look at this photograph, and they won't really know who the people are. So I appreciate your adding that. I wanted to ask you a few other questions. We talked quite a bit about the leverage, during the negotiations, played by the U.S. and by Mexico and so forth. What kind of leverage, if any, did the Friends play during the implementation of the agreement.



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JM: I think that's a very good question. All along this process we kept saying that it was very important that once we signed the peace that the next stage was extremely important – that is what we call the “peace building.” And “peace building” for us was mainly helping the Salvadorians to develop their country, mainly helping the Salvadorians to implement the agreements. And in fact Mexico made an exception, because we never participate in any peacekeeping operations with forces. We have very strict rules about not sending troops into any other country, even if it's the blue helmets. We have a tradition in our Constitution that we respect dearly, but in this particular case with El Salvador what we did is that we participate with police forces. One of our elite groups that are very well trained are the ones of the Highway Patrol in Mexico, and we sent something like two hundred and fifty. It was very important for the Salvadorians to

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have Spanish-speaking people as members of the Police in the transition, but mainly Mexicans. Mexicans and Salvadorians are very much alike. They like each other – the music and so on and so forth. So it was not only a problem of Spanish-speaking but also the fact that they were Mexicans and in a difficult role. And I think that's a role that as a whole it was a success, that group that we sent, and we also helped them to develop better links with the Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], with the IMF [International Monetary Fund], and so on and so forth. Once again, Mexico was working very closely with the United States, helping them. Venezuela became involved in a lot of troubles with President Pérez, so it lost steam, a lot of steam, and Colombia for internal reasons as well, but Spain, the U.S., and Mexico made a tremendous effort. As I said, I don't want to believe that the other countries were not really supportive. They were very supportive, but they had other pressures in their agenda, and it was mainly the U.S., Mexico, and Spain that were very actively engaged in supporting.

JK: Did Mexico or Spain or the U.S. offer the El Salvadorians funds for the agrarian reform or redistribution that they were going through? I understand that in the demobilization camps there were some problems that arose, and –

JM: Yeah, in fact what we did, President Salinas created a mechanism – it still exists. It is called TUCSLA?. Tucsla is a city in the South part of Mexico, in Chiapas, where Salinas convened the Presidents of Central America to create a mechanism how we can help each other and mainly to help El Salvador and the peace building process. I think that the TUCSLA mechanism has given a lot of support to the Salvadorian process.

However, I also believe that the Four-Plus-One and the International Community as a whole has not been as supportive as everybody expected, in El Salvador. I think that for one reason or another – economic conditions in the different countries and so on and so forth – I think that the Salvadorians have not received the support that it was committed, was promised. I think that they have been let very much alone. Mexico has been making efforts. As I said, President Salinas and now President Zedillo [Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León] have been working with this mechanism, but to be very honest and very candid, I think that it's short of what we were supposed to be committed. The Four-Plus-One and the European Community and so and so forth, Japan, everybody who made commitments I think has failed to fulfill those commitments.



JK: Yeah, it's really a shame that that's the case.

JM: But I know that you have heard this before --

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JK: I have heard this, yes.

JM: Salvador and so forth, that they have so many lacks that they have not been able really to overcome those lacks, no?

JK: Now I wanted to talk about a couple of the issues involved. We've been talking a lot about process, but you had been, early on, very involved in human rights. And one of

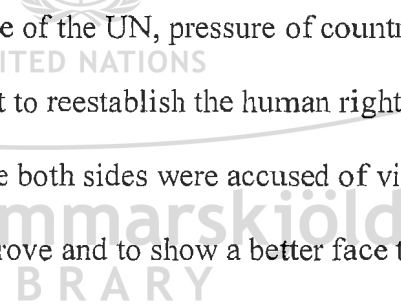
the unique things about the agreements that evolved on El Salvador, that in fact the first agreement that was reached was on human rights.

JM: Yes.

JK: And it was even a reach before a cease-fire.

JM: Right.

JK: So how did that happen?



JM: I think, in a way, with the pressure of the UN, pressure of countries like Mexico, Spain, and others, that it's very important to reestablish the human rights in El Salvador. And I think both sides wanted to, because both sides were accused of violating human rights, and I think both sides wanted to prove and to show a better face to the world, to the International Community. I guess that's the reason why they accepted to have the monitoring human rights there, and ONUSAL became a very important instrument for them to reestablish. They wanted to prove their good faith, and they wanted to receive assistance on how to establish the human rights in El Salvador, and they were prepared to train the Police to accept the code of how to respect human rights and so forth. So I guess, in a way I would say that they accepted that even before you have a peace process starting because they wanted to save face and to show that they were acting in good faith. And that for me is the main explanation. It sounds very odd, trying to establish human

rights when you don't have peace, but I would say that both sides understood very well that it was extremely important to have the support of the International Community. I mentioned to you before, the FMLN/FDR had always, always a very deep concern about: "What the International Community will think about us?" And they were not at all trouble guys caring less about the International Community. They were very concerned about it. They were concerned about Geneva. They were concerned about the Third Committee ? at the UN, and the government had the obligation to be concerned, but let's say the rebels themselves accepted that they want to comply with International Law, which is very unusual as well. In any guerrillas, they couldn't care less. They want the power. And this particular group, particularly at the end, were very concerned about how they are seen, because they wanted to be eligible to be authorities, to be a government, and if you behave like a trouble guy nobody was going to respect you. And so that's why they decided to give support to human rights.

JK: Was it also partly because they had been unable to reach agreement on other issues, like the reform of the military, and wanted to come up with something out of those meetings?

JM: No, I would say that when the UN proposed to them the ONUSAL they decided that that was also not only to prove to the International Community, but to prove to the other side: "Okay, I'm prepared to do something. I want to show you that I'm acting in good faith." They had such bad blood among themselves. After all, they were the same, you know? It was amazing. Sometimes you would find that three brothers were in one

side and the other three brothers were in the other side, and it was such a small country. It was a civil war, and – for all practical purposes it was a civil war – and so it was ridiculous. You could see Alfredo Cristiani, they had been to school with several other members of the leadership of the FMLN, or Margarita Cristiani had been friends with the third cousin of this one or the other. They were so closely interrelated, but they also disliked each other a lot. After almost 20 years the separation of the two sides was tremendous. So I guess that for internal purposes they want to show: “Yes, I want to show you that I want to do things, and for the International Community we are prepared to comply with International Law.”

JK: Okay. Did they really think that coming up with that agreement on human rights would actually make a difference in how the peace process itself evolved? There have been books and theories that, in fact, by having ONUSAL there monitoring human rights, that it created a greater sense of confidence in the country itself which then led to the ability to have a cease-fire. Is that a –

JM: I think that’s a fair assessment.

JK: Was that really anticipated when the agreements were reached?

JM: I think so, yes.

JK: They understood that.

JM: Yes. They were very clear about it, and I can tell you that because, as I mentioned before, in the '80's I was the Mexican delegate at the Human Rights Commission. And they had a Jesuit who was the main advisor on human rights, and this Jesuit, by the way, was Mexican. And he was my teacher here in Mexico many, many years ago when he was about to become a priest. And for one reason or another he went – like a good Jesuit – went to El Salvador, and lately he became closely linked with the FMLN, and he was the main advisor, Padre Moreno – Father Moreno. Father Moreno was going, moving from one place to another, very articulate, intelligent fellow who had always the right drafting and the right wording and so and so forth. And they knew very well that human rights was clearly a very important coin to use as exchange for things. That explains – there are several explanations, but I think we have mentioned the few most important ones.

JK: Okay, that's very good. Well, now we had talked quite a bit about the group of Friends, and in your opinion is that mechanism a useful tool? Can it be replicated? Can it be used in other processes -- peace processes?

JM: Yes, I think so. To be honest with you, yes, I think it's a very useful tool providing that the parties concerned accept that, no imposed by – let's say – by the UN but that the parties concerned will accept that their support is important. Your authority, your legitimacy, your moral authority comes out of the fact that both sides believe that you can be a good broker.

JK: Okay, so that's important, because -- and actually, explain to me how this evolved -- because there was a group of Friends -- or still is -- on Guatemala. So how did that evolve out of the group of Friends on El Salvador?

JM: I think the, yes, in Guatemala obviously the example of El Salvador was a very important one. However, we're not talking about Guatemala now, but the Guatemalans at the early stage in the process were always insisting that Guatemala and El Salvador were different. And they didn't want any similar kind of approach, but then they realized that -- by the way, Mexico also played a very key role -- they realized that the Four Friends, or the Five Friends, or the Ten Friends can be a useful tool, and that's why they accepted. In fact, probably at the end of '92, when we started the negotiating process at the UN, I sat with the Westerners' ambassador Pickering, with Rigoberta Menchu [Rigoberta Menchu Tum] -- that later became Nobel Prize winner -- Rigoberta, and the three important commanders that went to negotiate in the UN. The first negotiation took place towards the end of '92 at the UN, the first encounter of the UN, and obviously, as I said, the Guatemalans were very reluctant to be treated like Salvadorians. They want a special kind of approach. It was a different kind of conflict and so on and so forth, but I guess that, going back to your question, yes, the Friends really proved to be a useful tool.

JK: And you were involved in the Guatemalan Friends group as well.

JM: Yes, that's right, yes.

JK: And did they somewhat follow the same model? Did you meet in the Mexican Mission with --

JM: That's correct, and the conversation took place in Mexico.

JK: And the conversation took place in Mexico, again.

JM: Again, because the guerrilla groups that were collectively organizing what is called the URNG [Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca] also had the ? with Mexico City. They were working here for several years, 20 years or so.



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JK: Well, I know that we've come to the end of your time.

JM: Do you want to have another question?

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JK: I've covered most of the things that I had written down for now, but just if you had anything specific you wanted to add?

JM: No, I think that, as I said I guess that, as I mentioned to you before, I guess that the negotiations in El Salvador had proved to be one of the most successful stages in the history of the UN. And unfortunately, for one reason or another, we haven't repeated that mogul, and I guess that it is important to recognize some lessons that you can draw from

that process, the UN should use it in the future. As I said, the fact that the Four-Plus-One with the support of the Secretary-General, but only with the support that the Four-Plus-One gave to the Secretary-General all along the process, is something that is necessary to stress. And it was so important, that support, that even Pérez de Cuéllar forgot to mention it in his own memoirs, because he thought he was the one who did it, but he didn't. He did it with the support of the Four-Plus-One. I think that that's when the UN can be effective, it's when it has the support of the actors. And if you don't have the support of the actors then you're lost.

JK: That's right, because alone the Secretary-General does not have leverage.

JM: The Secretary-General has no resources really to – whereas the countries' governments do have a clout, do have the influence to move things, but if you leave alone the Secretary-General then tomorrow you will call the Secretary-General a beauraucrat. What you need to have is a Secretary-General that has the full support, and who cares who takes the credit? What is important is your target, and your target here in your particular case is peace.

JK: Well thank you so much. I really, really appreciate your taking the time to do this.

JM: No, as I said, I'm convinced that what you're doing is extremely, extremely, important. As you can see – and I'm sure, because I saw that in your eyes, that you have

heard so many opinions, and some of them are contradictory. I don't know, but when you put together all these opinions -- as I said, in Mexico, like myself, that probably some of my friends consider me not necessarily very friendly with the U.S., but I say it's clearly important to recognize, the roles played by President Bush, by Secretary Baker, by General Powell, by people at all the levels, people in Congress. I mean, you had many members of Congress and even the Senate who played such an important role in this peace process, and that their voice was so important there -- pieces in the newspaper, and so and so forth. It's very unfair to read: "I did it," you know? I think it's so complex, so complicated that nobody can claim "I did it." So that's why to refer to history you have to bring together all those who participated, one way or another. At one level, as I said probably Colombia was not very big, but he gave his name. President Barco, President Gaviria was there. That's more than enough, you know? And others had more to give? Okay. You had more to give, you had an aircraft to give, or conversations with the generals. That's when it becomes a successful international operation.

JK: Right, well thank you so much.

Yale-UN Oral History
Jorge Montaña
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
October 1, 1999
Mexico City, Mexico

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